

**Bulletproof Heart**—A tough *noir*-ish little movie about a hit man (Anthony LaPaglia) who in the course of one night falls in love with the woman he's been ordered to kill (Mimi Rogers), only to find out that she knows what he's supposed to do and wants it to happen more than anyone. A solid, quietly observant flick with two great performances (Rogers's best since *The Rapture*) and a classic fade-out—make sure you stay to the end of the credits. (1 hr. 40 min.; NR) *Cinema Village* 12th St.

**Mina Tannenbaum**—An awkward, unsteady film about the friendship (or lack thereof) between the severe and demanding Mina (Romane Bohringer) and the shy but friendly Ethel (Elsa Zylberstein). They meet at age 7 and the movie follows them for the next 25 years. Except for some amusing moments of teenage uncertainty about their looks and the prospect of dating, it's essentially a rather dark and serious story. But writer/director Martine Dugowson uses such jarringly whimsical devices as guardian angels to tell it. Increasingly uninteresting as it goes along. In French. (2 hrs. 8 min.; NR) Quad Cinema; Lincoln Plaza.

**Higher Learning**—Director John Singleton overreaches again in this messy, overweening, poorly shot movie. He tries to take a look at life on college campuses and, effectively, in America. In one scene alone, Singleton manages to raise the issues of homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, gay-bashing, cultural diversity, racial tension, skinheads, violence, murder, and police brutality. That must be some sort of record, but it's hardly worth the effort. (2 hrs. 7 min.; R) *MovieLand 8th St.; Criterion Center; Movieplex 42; 84th St. Six.*

**Ballet**—Through 4/4. Frederick Wiseman's latest documentary employs the usual techniques: a leisurely, even indulgent, running time; a conspicuous absence of voice-overs or explanatory titles; and a predilection for long, quietly observant scenes. As always, his style is ideally suited to capturing the rhythms and realities of a world—in this case, the American Ballet Theater. Most of it is devoted to practice sessions, with the final eighty minutes showing the ABT on tour, with performance excerpts and scenes of dancers at play. While there is nothing revelatory here, it is engaging and fascinating throughout. Newcomers to ballet, entranced by *The Red Shoes*, will come face-to-face with endless rehearsals and stern taskmasters. And certainly aficionados will find even more to savor. Later scenes showing the dancers relaxing on the beach or strolling in parks seem tangential at best, but like every other glimpse of these dedicated artists, it leaves one thought uppermost in your mind: "I need to work out." (2 hrs. 50 min.; NR) *Film Forum.*

**SLEEP WITH ME**—The premise didn't bode well: Angst-ridden young people wander in and out of love, complete with the overused device of shooting some scenes from the perspective of a home-movie camera. The screenplay sounded gimmicky, too: It was created round-robin style by a host of writers. But it works wonderfully well, thanks to terrific acting and sharp, observant writing that doesn't belie its strange origin. Eric Stoltz and Meg Tilly play a young couple about to marry when their best friend (Craig Sheffer) realizes he is deeply in love with the bride-to-be. Tilly hasn't had a part this involving in ages, and she makes the most of it, as do Sheffer and the omnipresent Stoltz with their roles. Highlights include a tea party scene written by the always hilarious Joe Keenan and a cameo by Quentin Tarantino in which he definitively proves *Top Gun* to be the most brilliant and subversive movie of the eighties. Painful and funny, this is a promising debut for director Rory Kelly. (1 hr. 26 min.; R) Village Theatre 111; Carnegie Hall Cinema.

**THE NEXT KARATE KID**—Pat Morita takes a new pupil under his care, and this time it's a girl! (Specifically Hillary Swank.) Expect more lessons in humility, forbearance and the need to follow the path of peace. Followed, of course, by a rousing fight in which the bad guys (or gals) get creamed. Directed by Chris Cain. (1 hr. 44 min.; PG) Village Theatre VII; 23rd Street West Triplex; Criterion Center; Movieplex 42; Orpheum; Olympia Cinemas.

**A Goofy Movie**—Not every Disney animated flick is a box-office steamroller, knocking down all family-film competition in its path. Presented without the usual full-court press of publicity, this is Goofy's first feature of his own. Can the 63-year-old comic (reportedly a major influence on Jerry Lewis) still appeal to the kids? Well, regardless of how he does in the theaters, *Goofy* is sure to score dependably when it comes out on home video. (1 hr. 16 min.; G) *Village East*; 23rd St. West Triplex; Guild 50th St.; Sutton; 86th St. East; 84th St. Six.

**SPANKING THE MONKEY**—That's slang for masturbating, something Raymond (Jeremy Davies) rarely gets a chance to do in this entertaining, blackly humorous feature. His dad is away on business and his mom is laid up in bed, constantly calling for drinks or food or simply to complain about Raymond's poor attitude. Raymond is obviously angry about having to turn down a terrific internship in Washington, D.C., just to play nurse. A rather standard setup, until *Spanking* convincingly detours into *Murmur of the Heart* territory, with far more dangerous repercussions than in Louis Malle's classic. Davies starred in those Subaru ads in which the car was compared to punk music. Written and directed with flair by David O. Russell. (1 hr. 38 min.; NR) Angelika Film Center; Plaza; Thalia Theater.

**TRUE LIES**—Director James Cameron, the master of the big bang, returns with another summer extravaganza. Arnold Schwarzenegger stars as a seemingly mild-mannered fellow who is actually a secret agent involved in all sorts of derring-do. How much did it cost—\$70 million? \$100 million? Who cares? With Cameron, it's almost all on the screen: Expect stunning special effects and elaborate stunts à la *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. With Jamie Lee Curtis and Tom Arnold, who should know something about living dangerously. (2 hrs. 15 min.; R) *Movieland 8th Street; Chelsea; 34th Street Showplace; Crown Gotham; National Twin; Ziegfeld; 86th Street; Regency.*

**CORRINA, CORRINA**—Whoopi Goldberg plays a housekeeper who rouses a family out of their stupor after the sudden death of the mother. Ray Liotta is the jingle-writing widower falling apart at work over the loss; Tina Majorino is the little girl who refuses to speak. Naturally he and Goldberg strike up a low-key relationship, and the kid learns to laugh again. Both leads are quite appealing (not a given for Goldberg or Liotta), but the story is far too familiar, sentimental, and slowly paced to ever rouse an audience out of its stupor. Written and directed by Jessie Nelson. (1 hr. 54 min.; PG) *Cinema I, II, Third Ave.*

**FOREIGN STUDENT**—A French college student (Marco Hofschneider of *Europa Europa*) spends a semester studying in the South during the fifties. He falls in love with a beautiful girl (Robin Givens) and blues music, showing good taste but a deadly dull predictability. They do make a cute couple, though. Adapted by Menno Meyjes from the autobiographical novel by Philippe Labro. We can only hope his real life was more entertaining. Directed by Eva Sereny. (1 hr. 36 min.; R) Village East; Festival Theater.

**LONDON**—This droll, fascinating movie is quite unique. It combines documentary footage of London shot during 1992 with narration by Paul Scofield telling the fictionalized story of Robinson and his former lover (the unnamed Scofield). They wander the city and decry its present state of affairs in terms only an intellectual could love. While quietly satirizing the manner in which they comment on their surroundings, writer-director-cameraman Patrick Keiller also manages to justify their feelings of despair in subtle, effective ways. Funny, poignant, and quite remarkable, *London* is not to be missed. (1 hr. 24 min.; NR) *Film Forum*.

**Martha and I**—Marianne Saegebrecht is a formidable talent who rarely finds movies that can showcase her unique charm. While this World War II-era love story isn't particularly noteworthy, at least it gives her a dramatic role of substance. Saegebrecht is Martha, the German maid of a prominent Jewish doctor in Czechoslovakia. When the doctor's lovely wife dallies with another man, he divorces her and turns to the rather plain and submissive Martha as an easy substitute. Martha's poor family is properly delighted by her rich catch while his is shocked at having to socialize with the help. Their easy compatibility turns to love just as the encroaching Third Reich turns the doctor's role as protector into one of liability. With Michel Piccoli. Written and directed by Jiri Weiss. In German. (1 hr. 47 min.; NR) *Quad Cinema.*

**The Wooden Man's Bride**—Unexpected plot twists are the main pleasures of this Chinese drama, so the less you know the better. But if you're still reading, it's about a beautiful young woman heading for her marriage to a wealthy heir when the professional is attacked by the Whirlwind Bandits. She is whisked away and the groom-to-be accidentally kills himself when preparing to rescue her. A rough peasant, Kui, saves her through his courage, but the woman is forced to marry anyway ... to a wooden likeness of her dead groom. Though director Huang Jianxin doesn't have quite the eye of his contemporary Zhang Yimou, this is a well-acted, low-key drama of considerable merit. Through 2/21. In Mandarin Chinese. (1 hr. 53 min.; NR) *Film Forum.*



**Kiss—**Lawrence Kasdan's fall from grace—I *Love You to Death*, *Grand Canyon*, *Wyatt Earp*, and, most damning of all, the screenplay for *The Bodyguard*—has at least bottomed out with this unsurprising but inoffensive little romantic comedy that will have to hope *While You Were Sleeping* hasn't cornered the market. It stars Meg Ryan as a woman cuckolded by her mousy boyfriend, Timothy Hutton, when he discovers passion and romance in the arms of a French girl. Kevin Kline is a rascally Parisian who smuggles in goods in Ryan's bag and finds himself drawn into her attempts to win Hutton back. Ryan, too, comes out well here: She continues to relax on screen into a truly engaging presence, resorting to the cutesy mannerisms that brought her so far only once or twice. Kline, however, goes through the film with a greasy, half-shaven face, presumably so we can know he's naughty. The scene where she demands he get a shave, unfortunately, never occurs. (1 hr. 48 mins.; PG-13) *Movieland 8th Street*; *Chelsea*; *Crown Gotham*; *National Twin*; *Orpheum*; *Regency*.

**THE ADVENTURES OF PRISCILLA, QUEEN OF THE DESERT**—Fabulous costumes, fabulous music, a fabulous performance by Terence Stamp... and almost nothing else. Three drag queens in Sydney buy a bus and head across Australia to a gig at a resort hotel. Along the way they encounter ruffians, aboriginal friends, and—worst of all—boredom. Stamp is a marvel as the transsexual Bernadette, but the melodramatics surrounding him are paper-thin. Everything drags to a halt whenever someone has to confront his personal demons. And to transport the elaborate costumes, they feature at every turn, there'd have to be about ten buses trailing along behind. Sound too picky? Not when the humor depends on believing these three queens really are stranded in the outback with only their purses and their attitude to protect them. Expect endless comparisons to be made later in the year between this and *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything*, *Julie Newmar*, a comedy featuring Wesley Snipes and Patrick Swayze in drag. Written and directed by Stephan Elliot. With Hugo Weaving of *Proof* and Guy Pearce. (1 hr. 42 min.; R) *Village Theatre VII*; *Lincoln Plaza Cinemas*.

**The Jerky Boys**—Alternate title: *Dumbest*. (1 hr. 22 min.; R)

**What Happened Was...**—A terrific, probing drama that captures the pain, neediness, and terror of two lonely people on their first date. They both work in a law firm, but have rarely exchanged more than banalities before tonight. Unexpectedly revealing and memorable, it was written and directed by playwright Tom Noonan, who also stars. Created a strong buzz at Sundance, and proves worthy of the attention. A good date movie if you really want to know what the person you're with is like. (1 hr. 32 min.; NR) *Angelika Film Center*.

**Exit to Eden**—Anne Rice took out a huge ad in *Variety* to tell all of Hollywood she was terribly, terribly wrong about prejudging *Interview With the Vampire*: It is, in fact, far better than she ever dared hope. Don't wait for her to take out a similar ad extolling this comedic take on one of her naughty sadomasochistic fantasies. It manages to make Dana Delany look silly instead of sexy; Rosie O'Donnell seem annoying instead of funny; and Paul Mercurio of *Strictly Ballroom* appear downright unattractive. There's some sort of talent in that, but it's the kind of talent celebrated in *Ed Wood*. Directed by Garry Marshall. (1 hr. 53 min.; R) *Waverly*; *Chelsea*; *Criterion Center*; *Movieplex 42*; *1st & 62nd Street*; *Orpheum*; *62nd and Broadway*.

**Oleanna**—David Mamet's purposefully provocative stage play comes to the screen virtually unchanged. In other words, his story of a college professor accused by a student of sexual harassment is still edgy, obvious, infuriating, simple-minded when it hopes to be complex, and yet somehow sparks discussions among those that have seen it that are far more enjoyable and enlightening than the movie itself. With William H. Macy and Debra Eisenstadt. Written and directed by Mamet. (1 hr. 30 min.; NR) *19th Street East*; *Lincoln Plaza Cinema*.

**Burnt by the Sun**—What a surprise. For once, the Oscar for Best Foreign Film actually went to what may well be the most deserving of a strong group. Quite charming and ultimately quite moving, it depicts an idyllic Russia just before Stalin's true tyranny began to emerge. On a summer day in 1936, an aging Bolshevik hero whistles away the hours with his lovely younger wife, eccentric friends, and adoring little girl. When an old lover of his wife's who has since joined the secret police makes an unexpected call, the subtle change in tone from playful bantering to resigned despair is almost unbearable. Co-writer, director, and star Nikita Mikhalkov is exceptional as the hero. And while it's dangerous to single out child performers—especially on their first effort—his daughter Nadia Mikhalkov is every bit as assured and adorable as she was on the Oscars. In Russian. (2

**Amateur**—Having a well-known star such as Isabelle Huppert appear in his latest film is hardly a shocking case of sellout for director Hal Hartley. Still, it's telling that it should occur in his weakest movie in years. Mining his familiar terrain of droll, good-looking characters engaged in sharp self-observation, Hartley spins an absurdist tale about a former nun writing pornography, a vengeful porn star, and an overempathetic police officer brought together by Thomas Martin Donovan. He's a charming and handsome fellow who suffers from amnesia and appears to have been a real bastard before his memory loss kicked in. Intelligently done, with strong support from Hartley's usual collaborators. But the irony isn't thick enough, with too much time spent on surprisingly straightforward plot developments. One keeps waiting for the joke, for the cheeky spin on movie conventions—but no one seems to be kidding, at least not enough. (1 hr. 45 min.; R) *Angelika Film Center*; *Lincoln Square*.

**Wings of Courage**—Director Jean-Jacques Annaud's foray into 3-D Imax is a surprisingly sedate affair about French airmail pilots who flew a dangerous route over the Andes. After some initial flying scenes, it settles into a quiet pattern of shots of Craig Sheffer climbing/walking to safety after a plane crash alternated with shots of worried loved ones safely at home. It's 3-D! Throw some spears at us or something, one can't help but think. But Annaud scrupulously avoids any such pandering, which would be fine if the story were more engaging. It isn't, but the nifty new technology is marvel enough to keep the curious sated. There's a real sense of depth to the picture and audience members in front of you occasionally seem to be surrounded by snow and mountain. Just a gimmick, probably, but a fun one. With Val Kilmer and Elizabeth McGovern. (40 min; PG) *Lincoln Square*.

**Disclosure**—Michael Crichton is on top of the world: He's behind the biggest movie hit of last year (*Jurassic Park*) and the biggest TV show in ages (*ER*). Director Barry Levinson is somewhere near the bottom: He's gone into a critical and commercial tailspin with *Toys* and *Jimmy Hollywood*, while his TV show (*Homicide*) receives kudos...and an audience of four on Friday nights. They'll probably meet somewhere in the middle with this deliberately provocative sexual-harassment drama, with Demi Moore as a boss who hits on employee Michael Douglas then ruthlessly charges him with improper behavior. The hi-tech aspect (Crichton loves gadgets) appears in their company's tinkering with virtual reality. (2 hrs.; R) *Village Theatre VII*; *Chelsea*; *Murray Hill Cinemas*; *Criterion Center*; *New York Twin*; *Orpheum*; *Lincoln Square*.

**IN THE ARMY NOW**—Pauly Shore in a witless comedy, which is as redundant as it gets. Directed by Daniel Petrie Jr. (1 hr. 31 min.; PG) *Village East*; *23rd Street West Triplex*; *Embassy 2-4*; *Sutton*; *86th Street East*; *New Coliseum*; *Olympia Cinemas*.



**Moving the Mountain**—Yet another documentary that shouldn't hold its breath waiting for the Academy Awards to call. Directed by Michael Apted, it depicts all the events surrounding the Tiananmen Square massacre through the eyes of the student leaders who were thrust into the international spotlight by their pivotal roles in the demonstrations that led to it. The movie focuses especially on Li Lu, presumably because his story is paradigmatic and because he speaks excellent English. Unfortunately, it makes extensive use of dramatic recreations to tell the story of Li's early life, and it becomes difficult to tell when footage is wholly fictional, when it's genuine but unrelated to the actual event being described, and when it's actually the real thing (there are some great shots of the students in the square). Besides, its thumbnail sketch of Chinese history leading up to that tragic event isn't particularly revealing. *Moving the Mountain* is strongest when interviewing the student leaders—many of whom now live abroad—and we can see their pain and turmoil over having watched other young people die because of decisions they made. Produced by Trudie Styler. In Chinese and English. (1 hr. 23 min.; NR) *Film Forum*.

**Tommy Boy**—Chris Farley must save the family business by outsmarting Rob Lowe and Bo Derek. Hmmm. Too close to call? (1 hr. 36 min.; PG) *Art Greenwuch Twin; 19th St. East; Astor Plaza; Movieplex 47; New York Twin; Orpheum; 84th St. Six.*

**Highlander—The Final Dimension**—*Highlander* never received the love and affection bestowed on *Star Trek* and its progeny, but it's become quite the little franchise: Three feature films, a syndicated series, and (presumably) comic books and action figures. Immortal Christopher Lambert certainly knows this: He walked off the set during filming until producers coughed up the money he felt he deserved. In what's billed as the final chapter and "a direct sequel to the first *Highlander* (in other words, just put *Highlander II: The Quickening* out of your mind), Connor MacLeod (Lambert) faces down Kane, the Master of Illusion (Mario Van Peebles). Directed by Andy Morahan. (1 hr. 34 min.; PG-13) *Village East; Murray Hill Cinemas; 23rd St. West Triplex; Embassy 2-4; Manhattan Twin; Orpheum; 84th St. Six.*

**THE LAST KLEZMER**—A rather pedestrian documentary about Leopold Kozlowski, a Polish Jew and master of klezmer music. Kozlowski saw his family killed during the Holocaust, and the film follows him as he travels to the sites where they were murdered. A few touching moments, yet perhaps the saddest part is that a story so undeniably wrenching can seem so familiar and dull. And—strangely—there's not enough klezmer music! Directed by Yale Strom. (1 hr. 23 min.; NR) *The Film Society of Lincoln Center.*

**LASSIE**—*Arf, arf!* What's that, girl? You say you're coming out with a new movie? *Arf, arf, arf!* It's like the classic Lassie of yore, but with a modern, dysfunctional family for the nineties? *Arf, arf!* People who want to see it in Spanish should go to the New Coliseum? *Sil!* Good girl. (1 hr. 35 min.; PG) *Village East; 23rd Street West Triplex; Embassy 2-4; Sutton; Columbus Circle; New Coliseum.*

**Stargate**—Any true movie buff should be looking forward to this sci-fi extravaganza. Kurt Russell and James Spader are archaeologists thrown across time and space into a titanic battle between good and evil. An elaborate European production with, apparently, a first-timer at the helm (Roland Emmerich), it has the sheen of *Dune* or *Flash Gordon* or any other comic extravaganza you can name. Toss in Jaye Davidson as an androgynous king/queen (No, really, I have no desire to act. *The Crying Game* was a fluke. Acting is not who I am.... You want to pay me *how* much?) as an added bonus. There's even the delicious possibility that it could be genuinely good. But one way or another, it's going to be fun. (2 hrs. 5 min.; PG-13) *Waverly; Chelsea; 34th Street Showplace; Criterion Center; Movieplex 42; First & 62nd St. Cinema; Orpheum; 84th Street Six; New Coliseum; Nova.*

## REVIVALS

**BLADE RUNNER** (1982)—The director's cut is a quiet revelation. The Chandler-esque narration of Harrison Ford is mostly gone, but what really amazes are the jaw-dropping shots of Los Angeles in all its decaying, crowded, futuristic glory. They must have cost a bundle—and they add immeasurably to the movie's atmosphere—so it's impossible to understand why they were cut. Most importantly, a subtle addition changes the impact of the entire film. Pay attention to the unicorn. (1 hr. 57 min.; R) *Film Forum.*

**An Unforgettable Summer**—Romanian director Lucian Pintilî follows his messy, memorable feature *The Oak*—a look at his shambles of a country after the fall of Ceausescu—with a far less frantic period piece. In it, a colonel transferred to a bleak outpost in the twenties is ordered to kill a randomly collected group of Bulgarian peasants in retaliation for the massacre of soldiers by Macedonian bandits. The colonel does everything he can to avoid doing so, while his wife becomes more and more committed to keeping them alive. It ends tragically, of course, with pointed reference to the foolishness of ethnic hatred and the mindless hunger for revenge against someone/anyone. Not as emotionally ravaging as it should be, though Kristin Scott-Thomas is quite good as the wife. Written and directed by Pintilî. (1 hr. 22 min.; NR) *Quad Cinema; Cinema 3.*

**BARCELONA**—Whit Stillman's long-awaited follow-up to *Metropolitan* proves to be worth the anticipation. It drolly details the relationship of two American cousins in Spain. One is a businessman in awe of the head of his company; the other is a Navy representative who may be the worst possible choice for a diplomatic mission anywhere, much less in the anti-American city of Barcelona. Anyone who thought Stillman captured the arch phrasing and incessant self-awareness of the upper crust in *Metropolitan* will now realize those were Stillman's obsessions, not his characters', because it's all here again. With Taylor Nichols and Christopher Eigeman. (1 hr. 41 min.; PG-13) *Angelika Film Center; Carnegie Hall Cinema; Eastside Playhouse.*

**CAFE AU LAIT**—A scrawny white bicycle messenger and a well-off African Muslim are both dating a beautiful West Indian named Lola. She tells both of them—at the same time—about the existence of the other lover and of her pregnancy. Who the father might be is anyone's guess. Written, directed, and starring Frenchman Mathieu Kassovitz, it offers hints of Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It* but nothing more. There's endless racial slurs and angry confrontations, but both men are so tiresome it's hard to imagine what the very appealing Lola sees in them. In French. (1 hr. 34 min.; R) *Angelika Film Center; Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.*

**Metal and Melancholy**—A witty and insightful documentary that looks at the taxicab drivers of Lima, Peru, providing a sharp and telling look at its society as a whole. Since virtually everyone seems to have two or three jobs to make ends meet, most of the people profiled are also government officials, teachers, and so on. When one cab is stopped by a policeman who wants to check on the film crew's credentials, he turns out to be a cabdriver on his off-hours as well. ("Do you want to photograph me?" he asks hopefully.) The constant stream of street-side vendors, the revealing anecdotes (one man tells of his true love; one woman breaks down when speaking about her estranged father), the amusing ways in which people try to rig their autos so they can't be stolen, have a cumulative power. Though it makes brief, unsuccessful forays away from the cabs and into more direct social commentary, *Metal and Melancholy* generally sticks to the road mapped out for it with fine results. In Spanish. (1 hr. 20 min.; NR) *Film Forum.*

**THE NEW AGE**—Michael Tolkin, the writer of *The Player*, follows his intriguing directorial debut *The Rapture* with another movie that examines spiritual and moral issues. Here his musings are given voice in the story of an L.A. power couple who find themselves slipping financially, socially, and morally into nonexistence. Peter Weller and Judy Davis star as the bickering couple who lose work and status, but the dilemmas they face aren't terribly compelling. She looks for solace in alternative religions; he looks for it in drugs and fly-by-night telephone salesmanship. Nothing here is as gripping as *The Rapture*, which had the benefit of Mimi Rogers's tremendous performance. But it's a noble, if boring, failure. When Tolkin falls flat, he does it with determination. (1 hr. 55 min.; R) *Village East; Tower East.*

**LIBELED LADY** (1936)—Anyone who compares Nick Nolte and Julia Roberts in *I Love Trouble* to William Powell and Myrna Loy is crazy. (Actually, comparing anyone to Powell and Loy is crazy, but Nolte and Roberts weren't even close.) Even when they weren't playing Nick and Nora, Powell and Loy were a formidable team. Here, they appear in a newspaper comedy. She's a wealthy young woman, he's a friend of editor Spencer Tracy sent to sully her good name. Soon enough, they fall in love. Very charming and Jean Harlow is hilarious as Tracy's long-suffering fiancée. (1 hr. 38 min.) *Museum of Modern Art.*



**Only the Brave**—A debut feature from lesbian filmmaker Ana Kokkinos looks at the lives of two young Australian girls of Greek descent who are desperate to escape their stultifying lives but unable to imagine how. Alex comes closest with her desire to write and an increasingly intimate relationship with a shy but encouraging teacher. Vicki wants to sing, she thinks, but is much more successful at random acts of arson. Both girls have boyfriends, if only for show: They'd much rather be with each other, though neither one seems quite prepared to put their thoughts into action. A steady debut that covers out-of-control teens, drinking, drugs, sexuality, and incest without seeming preachy but without much new insight either. Familiar territory, but decently covered until a finale that seems to come out of the Hays Code demand for punishment of anyone who doesn't follow societal norms. Paired with *Playing the Part*, a 38 min. short by Mitch McCabe about coming out to her family. (1 hr. 2 min.; NR) *Cinema Village 12th St.*

**SALMONBERRIES**—Before k.d. lang came out, she played a lesbian in this rather dour drama from German director Percy Adlon. Sadly, the quirky sensibility he developed in *Sugarbabies* and *Baghdad Cafe* has gone seriously awry with *Rosalie Goes Shopping* and now this. It remains to be seen whether lang can act; she's given little to do as an androgynous orphan in Alaska who wrestles with her identity before wrestling with a local librarian (Rosel Zech). But no one could ever doubt that lang can sing: The highlight of the film is its occasional use of the haunting theme song "Barefoot," co-written by her and Bob Telson (who wrote the equally terrific song "Calling You" for *Baghdad*). Die-hard fans may also enjoy the brief bit of frontal nudity. (1 hr. 34 min.; NR) *Quad Cinema*.

**The Sum of Us**—In this Australian comic drama, Dad (Jack Thompson) is exceptionally open and accepting of his son's homosexuality. Since his son is the quite handsome Russell Crowe (*Proof*), so are many of the local lads. Still, they both search for love, unsuccessfully (at first). Based on a play by David Stevens, it never overcomes its theatrical origins, with stagey dialogue and characters awkwardly addressing the camera throughout. (1 hr. 35 min.; NR) *Village Theatre VII; Carnegie Hall Cinema*.

**The Basketball Diaries**—Jim Carroll's autobiographical novel about a budding high-school basketball star

who finds himself spiraling out of control because of drugs is fatally marred by being switched from the seventies to the present. Also desperately missed from the book is Carroll's overwhelming sense of fatalism, which went some ways toward explaining why he sought dangerous, momentary escape from such an outwardly appealing life. (Not that one needs a reason, but at least it was something to hang your hat on.) Without it, this is just a familiar tale of a person who hits rock bottom drug-wise and then pulls out of it. Leonardo DiCaprio is good, of course, as Carroll. But the real surprise here is the fine supporting cast, especially Mark ("Marky Mark") Wahlberg, who does appear briefly in his underwear, and Patrick McGaw, who doesn't but hopefully will sometime in the near future. Directed by Scott Kalvert. (1 hr. 42 min.; R) *Village East; 19th St. East; Criterion Center; Crown Gotham; Orpheum; 84th St. Six*.

**Bar Girls**—Like last year's indie hit *Go Fish*, this is a comic drama focusing on women who are falling in and out of love with other women. Men put in token appearances and angst—thankfully—doesn't even merit a cameo. While *Go Fish* had a strong script but a generally weak if game cast, *Bar Girls* has a more pedestrian girl-meets-girl story delivered by a stronger cast (and stronger tech credits) all around. Written by Lauran Hoffman. Directed by Marita Giovanni (1 hr. 35 min.; R) *Quad Cinema; Carnegie Hall Cinema*.

**MAURICE** (1987)—Before he charmed the pants off America in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, Hugh Grant had to contend with James Wilby, who spent a good part of *Maurice* trying to charm the pants off him. Failing that (Grant's character finds the love that dare not speak its name too distressing), Wilby moves onto Scudder (Rupert Graves), a groundsman more in tune with his needs. Perhaps the most personal of the Merchant-Ivory collaborations on E. M. Forster. Directed by James Ivory; screenplay by Kit Hesketh-Harvey and James Ivory. (2 hrs. 15 min.; R) *Symphony Space*.

**Totally F\*\*\*ed Up**—A good title for this messy, self-conscious look at gay and lesbian teenagers adrift in Los Angeles. They must contend with hostile parents, gay-bashing, AIDS, drugs, and the temptation of suicide—not to mention a weak screenplay, tepid homages to Jean-Luc Godard and the much-abused mock-documentary approach to storytelling. Director Gregg Araki (*The Living End*) may reach those who go to anything gay-themed, but few others will follow. Still, it garners a mention as one of the few movies to be exclusively about gay teens. (1 hr. 20 min.; NR) *Quad Cinema*.

**Boys Life**—A compilation of three short films about young men coming to terms with their sexual orientation, *Boys Life* is well made, well acted, funny, and happily free of the angst that usually typifies the portrayal of gays in movies. *Pool Days*, written and directed by NYU grad Brian Sloan, is a sharp-eyed look at a high-school senior (Josh Weinstein) who serves as a lifeguard at a local gym, catching the eye of a female instructor and—more to his liking, though he can't admit it—a good-looking regular (Nick Poletti). *A Friend of Dorothy*, by Raoul O'Connell, shows an innocent college student hungry for intimacy but willing to wait for romance. And *The Disco Years*, written and directed by USC grad Robert Lee King, captures the seventies to a tee in the story of Tom (Matt Nolan), who has to decide between accepting himself and risking rejection by his family and friends. Angrier and more earnest than the others, it also manages to boogie its way to a satisfying finale. All are notable first and foremost as promising and entertaining debuts, rather than for any strides they may make in advancing onscreen portrayals of gays. That's just a bonus. And here's looking forward to a *Girls Life* in '95. (1 hr. 30 min.; NR) *Quad Cinema*.